LEAFLETS
of the Southern California Botanists

Volume 39 • Number 4 • October - December 2025

President's Message

Season's Greetings Southern California Botanists,

Whew, we made it through 2025! Give yourselves a pat on the back. I think it's safe to say the 51st Annual SCB Symposium: *Birds, Bees, Flies, and Seeds* was a hit! We are still reeling from all the great presentations on pollinators and seed dispersal. The vibes were high, and the conversations were riveting. ICYMI: Sarah Cusser shared some insights on 30 years of pollinator data on the salt marsh bird's beak (*Chloropyron maritimum* ssp. *maritimum*). Sam Droege dropped some truth bombs on the impacts of development on native bees. Dwight Whitaker demonstrated the explosive characteristics of seed and spore dispersal. Josh Kohn taught us (or maybe just me) a new word: geitanogamy. Dillon Travis discussed the impacts of honey bees on native pollinators in Southern California. Michael Viramontes got us all rooting for the underdog of the Inland Empire, the Delhi Sands flower-loving fly. Jay Sobel shined some light on the negative phototropism of limestone endemic monkeyflowers. Eric LoPresti stuck to the facts on sticky seed mucilage. Tom Parker delighted us with some cute photos of small mammals while explaining their profound influence on Arctostaphylos evolution. Finally, Krystle Hickman stunned the audience with some amazing photos from her adventures around the world. And to cap it all off, Sage Against the Machine blew the reception away with another face-melting performance in the Forest Pavillon at California Botanic Garden! We also need to give some big shoutouts to Alosta Brewing Company for supplying libations for the evening, and all of the exhibitors who captivated us with their beautiful artwork and cool endeavors (Did you know there's a newly formed California Native Bee Society?!). Lastly, I want to thank all the SCB board members who locked in to pull the event off without a hitch, and for all the hard work and dedication during my presidential term. I feel like the two years breezed by!

As we begin to look to the future, we want to thank everyone who participated in one of the many SCB activities this past year. We look forward to bringing you bitchin times in 2026. And with all this rain, who else is getting excited about the spring??? I sure am.

Cheers!

Drew Kaiser, 2024-2025 SCB President

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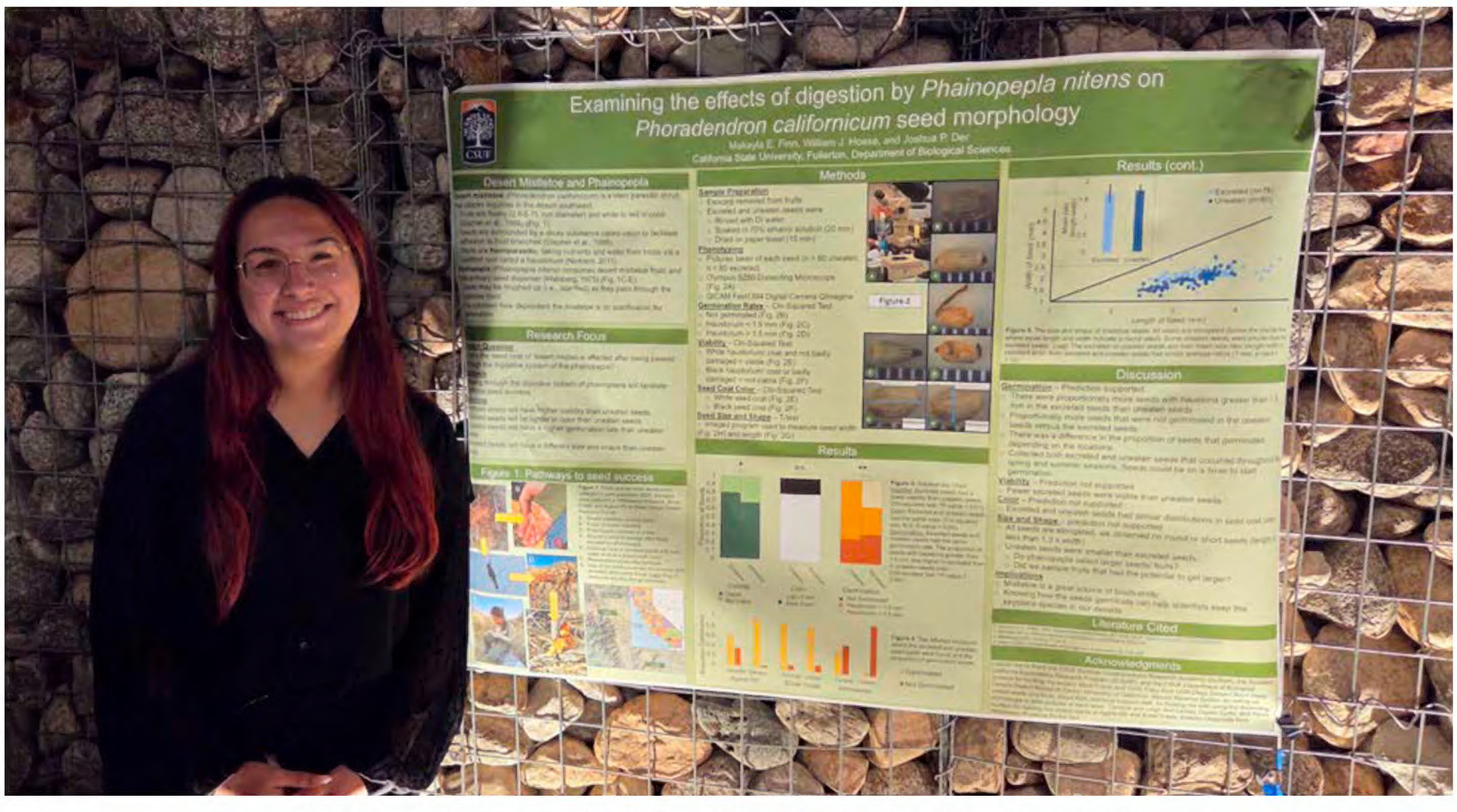
Western Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*) blooming in Piñon Hill on November 2, 2025.
Photo by Drew Kaiser.

Congratulations to our poster contest winners!

We had some amazing posters at this year's symposium, but two stood out above the rest. The winners are Chloe Novak (1st place) presenting the flora of the Amargosa River Headwaters and Makayla Finn (runner-up) examining the effects of digestion by *Phainopepla nitens* on *Phoradendron californicum* seed morphology. You can read their abstracts and the abstracts of the other poster presenters in the symposium program.

Poster winner Chloe Novak, presenting the flora of the Amargosa River Headwaters.


Examining the effects of digestion by Phainopepla nitens on Phoradendron californicum seed morphology
Makayla E. Finn, William J. Hoese, and Joshua P. Der
California State University, Fullerton, Department of Biological Sciences
Desert Mistletoe and Phainopepla
Research Focus
Figure 1. Pathways to seed success
Methods
Results
Results (cont.)
Discussion
Literature Cited
Acknowledgments

Poster winner runner-up Makayla Finn, examining the effects of digestion by *Phainopepla nitens* on *Phoradendron californicum* seed morphology.

Photos from the 2025 symposium

Laura Faulk (above), a vendor, sold her ceramics that depict California-native plants.

Jacob Aragon (above) from Alosta Brewing Company supplied libations for the evening.

Tom Parker (above) presenting on small mammals and their influence on *Arctostaphylos* evolution.

The California Native Bee Society (above) shared information about their newly formed organization.

Krystle Hickman (right) presenting her photos and on her new book, The ABCs of California's Native Bees.

Symposium attendees (above) enjoying socializing time during the banquet at the California Botanic Garden.

Sage Against the Machine (above) played at the reception in the Forest Pavillon at California Botanic Garden!

Symposium attendees (left) participating in the silent auction.

SCB BOARD ELECTIONS

It's time to vote for board candidates! Please review the profiles below, then use the following link to vote before February 2.
Vote here: https://forms.gle/Q7phQFeC4XXjBGYeA

President Candidate Short Biography

Diana Brand Ramirez (she, her, hers) is a botanist and native to southern California. She sprouted in Los Angeles and transplanted herself to San Diego where she has resided for the last twelve years. Professionally, she works as an ecologist for a consulting firm where she manages natural resource driven projects while trying stay in the field as much as possible. Her favorite part of the job is problem solving and botanizing with clients and co-workers/colleagues. Her focus as a consultant, is botany, habitat conservation, and the occasional document preparation project. She is eager to continue contributing to the SCB Board and looks forward to pushing the SCB goals forward.

Vice President Candidate Short Biography

Kristen Hasenstab-Lehman oversees the conservation genetics lab at the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden. She integrates field studies and molecular tools to document biodiversity and the interplay of ecological and evolutionary effects on plants of conservation concern. Kristen earned her Ph.D. in Botany at the California Botanic Garden and worked at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in the plant DNA barcoding lab.

Board Candidate Short Biographies

Anna Arft has been part of the San Diego Natural History Museum for over 15 years and is currently the Conservation Biology Research Project Manager. She holds a Ph.D., M.A., and B.A. from the University of Colorado Boulder and an M.Ed. from the University of Arizona. Her background includes research in plant physiology, botanical population genetics, and rare-plant conservation, and she completed postdoctoral work in the Arctic studying climate change impacts on plants.

Duncan Bell is the Senior Conservation Botanist for California Botanic Garden where he spends a great deal of time working in the field with the rare and endangered plants of California. He has a special affinity for California's deserts and a general love for the American Southwest. He is a lover of dinkophytes and narrow endemics.

Leah Dann graduated in 2025 with a PhD in Biodiversity and Conservation Science from the University of Queensland's School of the Environment. Their thesis investigated barriers to plant recruitment in a subtropical rainforest and developed practical management and conservation strategies to restore native plant communities on islands. They currently work as a field biologist for the Western Riverside County MSHCP where they monitor covered species, with a strong focus on native plant species. They are passionate about developing and implementing conservation plans to promote native ecosystem resilience and long-term persistence.

Nina House works at the University & Jepson Herbaria (UC/JEPS) as Managing Editor of the *Jepson* eFlora and a coordinator of the Jepson Public Programs. She began working at UC/JEPS in January 2023. Prior to that, she lived in southern California for 5.5 years. During her time there, she worked as a Seed Conservation Intern at the California Botanic Garden, before completing a master's degree in botany at the same institution. For her thesis, she completed a floristic inventory of the Manter & Salmon Creek watersheds in the southern Sierra Nevada, Tulare County, CA. Nina has been on the board of Southern California Botanists since 2019. She was vice president in 2020 and 2021, president in 2022 and 2023, and currently is the Editor of Leaflets.

Claire Jorgensen was born & raised in San Diego. After college in Oregon, and a couple months of pollinator research in North Dakota, she moved back home and has been a biological consultant with AECOM for almost 6 years. In her current role she is primarily involved in habitat restoration projects, rare plant monitoring, as well as the development of data collection and reporting tools for bio surveys throughout Southern California (& sometimes beyond). She is especially passionate about long term ecologic research, biogeography, plant community ecology, plant phenology, and San Diego County rare plants!

Drew Kaiser is a Senior Environmental Scientist in the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Native Plant Program working on the implementation of the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act. Prior to this position with the state, he worked for the National Park Service as a botanist for Mojave National Preserve and a rare plant specialist for Death Valley National Park. Drew has been on the SCB board since 2019 and most recently completed a two year term as President. In his free time, he enjoys backpacking, brewing beer, and volunteering for the GLORIA Great Basin chapter.

Mel Letterman is an Orange County-based botanist that has been working with plants and habitat restoration for 10 years. Currently, Mel works as a program coordinator at the Irvine Ranch Conservancy's Native Seed Farm where he leads bulk seed processing efforts and wild seed collections. In addition, he is a board member for the Orange County CNPS chapter where he is the committee lead for field trips and monthly program meetings.

Holly McMullen is a professor of horticulture at Southwestern College in Chula Vista, where she teaches plant science, identification, and propagation, and soil science. She leads the development of the Southwestern College Botanical Garden, a living laboratory for hands-on learning, community engagement, and accessible science education. Her work focuses on native plant horticulture, conservation, and applied botany, with active collaborations across Southern California on propagation, habitat restoration, and rare plant surveys. Holly serves on The Natural History Museum of San Diego's advisory board for the native garden and chairs the California Native Plant Society propagation committee for the San Diego chapter, where she helps connect students and community members to plant science through experiential learning.

Nathan Pinckard has worked as a Field Biologist for Western Riverside County's Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan's Biological Monitoring Program for seven years. During this time, he has deepened his understanding of Southern California ecology through monitoring a broad range of taxa, including, but not limited to, rare plants, Quino Checkerspot Butterfly, Delhi Sands Flower-loving Fly, and fairy shrimp. He graduated with an Ecology and Evolution B.S. degree from UC Santa Barbara in 2015. His interest in botany began during his college years. When he's not at work he enjoys reading science fiction, rock climbing, and roasting coffee.

Kim Pivetti has been studying and working in the field of Botany in Southern California for over a decade. Kim recently earned her M.S. degree in Botany from Claremont Graduate University and currently works as a Lead Field Botanist for the California Native Plant Society (CNPS). Kim is particularly interested in desert plants, floristics, climate change, conservation, and plant community ecology. Kim has been a regular member of SCB since 2018 and would love to become more involved.

Marisol Sanchez is a recent graduate from CSUF with a master's in biological science and conducted research on the germination of California native montane species. The are working as a restoration ecologist/ botanist currently and spend their downtime reading or exploring nature locally in Orange County, CA.

Sunny Saroa is a botanist and plant ecologist who has worked across Southern California for the past 9 years. Currently, he serves as an Environmental Planner for Caltrans District 12. Previously, he managed a native seed farm and worked in research labs focusing on plant community ecology, plant-soil-feedbacks, invasion ecology, and restoration ecology. Sunny is also active with the OC Chapter of CNPS, where he oversees grants and coordinates monthly programs. He has a passion for systematics, conservation, and loves to botanize in his free time. He is excited to continue serving on the SCB Board and collaborate with other botanists throughout the region.

IN MEMORIAM

Michael A. Honer
11 November 1958 — 13 December 2025

The California botany community lost a cherished friend and valued expert with the passing of Michael Honer on December 13th , 2025. Michael came to botany after a career in the photographic arts, in which environmental degradation was a prevalent theme of his works. After shifting his focus to botany, Michael received his Masters degree from what was then Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, through the Claremont Graduate School. In four years, he assembled a flora of nearly 500 vascular plant species of the Glass Mountain region of Mono County, between the Sierra Nevada and the White Mountains (Aliso 2001). Michael served on the Southern California Botanists Board of Directors from 2008 to 2016 and was an editor of Crossosoma from 2008 to 2013.

I met Michael in 2010 on my first real rare plant survey, in the desert outside Barstow. It was an appropriate place to meet someone whose somewhat surreal character stood out even from the expected eccentricity of botanists. Everyone who knew him will know what I'm talking about: the intense, more than slightly maniacal stare; the gum-cracking, wide-smiling exclamations over anything particularly pleasing, and the odd questions and statements delivered in an absolute deadpan that could be disconcerting until you realized it was an integral part of his enormous sense of humor. But once you figured that out, you were in for a good time.

Over our years working together in the California and Nevada deserts, Michael contributed hugely to both my botanical knowledge and my career advancement. But I never thought of him as a mentor or authority figure. From the beginning, he was simply one of my favorites, and however long and arduous a survey I faced, the knowledge that Michael was also on the crew would boost my enthusiasm immensely.

When I received the long-dreaded news of Michael's death, I began to travel that path of grief that inevitably becomes increasingly well-traveled as we age. As I scrolled through years of memories, I quickly realized that I have no bad memories of Michael. In the hundreds of miles we hiked together, in every extreme weather condition the desert could throw at us, down all the gnarly, tire-popping roads, through all the hair-tearing Astragalus and Eriogonum IDs, the worst annoyance I could recall was trying to decipher his handwriting. Nearly every memory I have of Michael makes me laugh and will for as long as I hold those memories. What an incredible legacy to leave ones friends: laughter and botany. I hope he left a similar legacy to those of you fortunate enough to have known him.

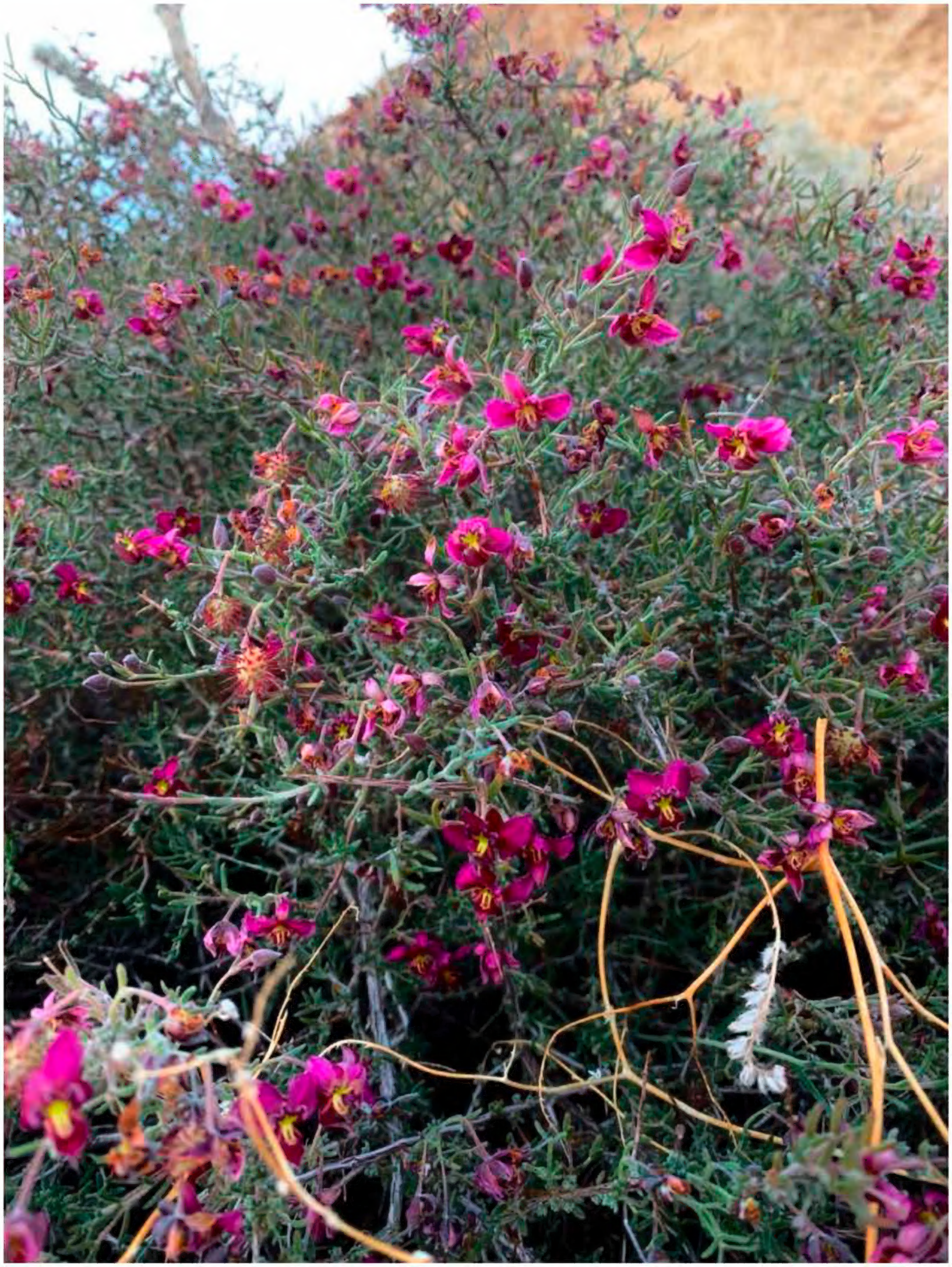
We will be publishing a more detailed memorial for Michael in an upcoming issue of Crossosoma. If you would like to contribute your thoughts and memories of Michael, please send them to my personal email address: mcloudhughes@gmail.com.

— Michelle Cloud-Hughes

What's in Bloom?

Showcasing the beauty of California's native flora.

Phacelia campanularia (Desert Bluebells)
Hydrophyllaceae
San Bernadino County, November 2025
Photo Credit: Duncan Bell



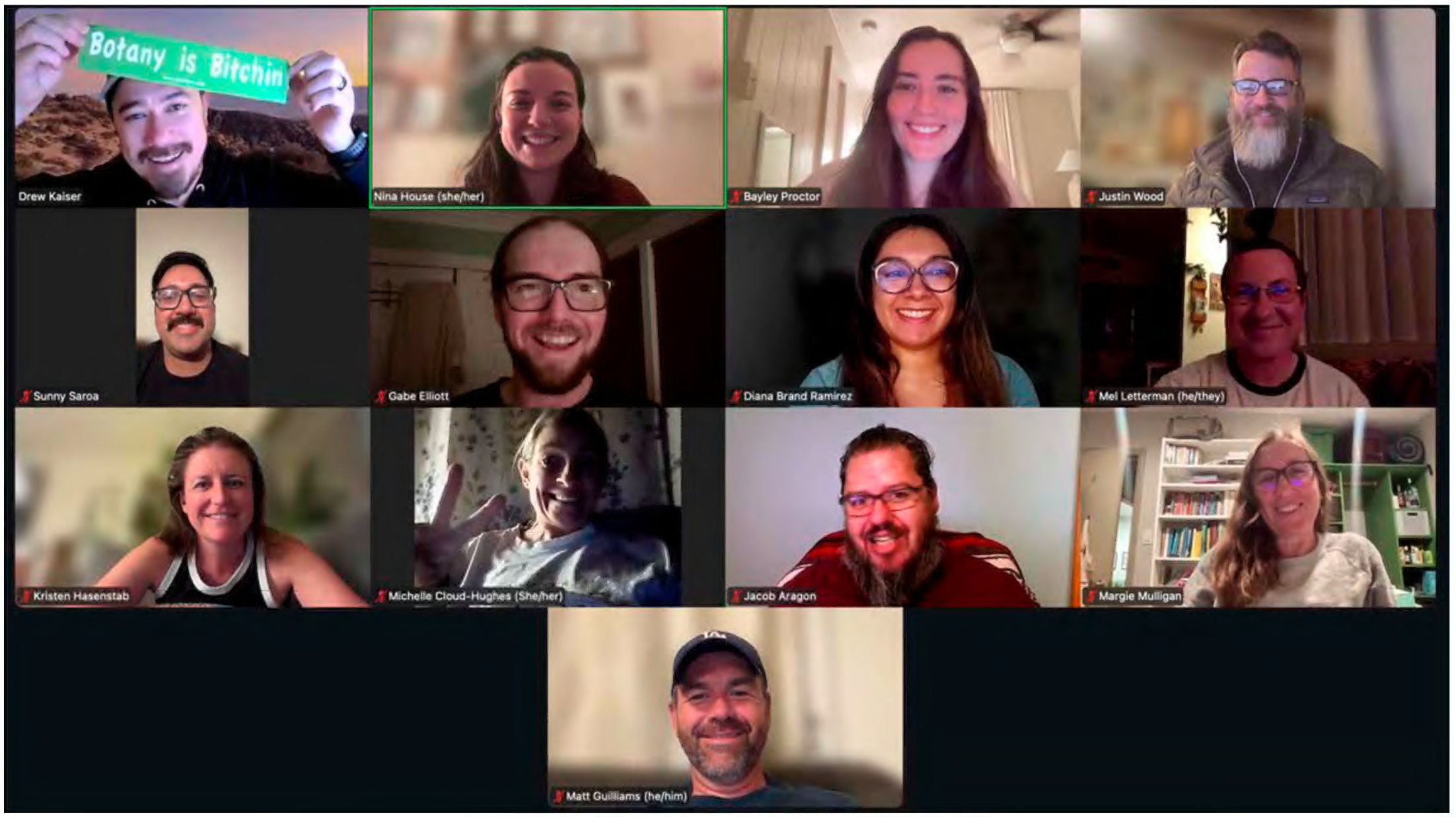
Krameria erecta (Littleleaf Rhatany)
Krameriaceae
San Bernadino County, November 2025
Photo Credit: Duncan Bell

CONGRATULATIONS NAOMI & PATRICK!

The newlyweds with some of Naomi's past and present graduate students. Fom left to right: Chloe Novack, Allison Autry, Sophie Winitsky, Patrick Donnelly, Naomi Fraga, Nina House, Peri Lee Pipkin, and Maria Jesus.

Congratulations to **Naomi Fraga** (longtime SCB board member, Director of Conservation Programs at the California Botanic Garden, Research Associate Professor at Claremont Graduate University) and **Patrick Donnelly** (Great Basin Director at the Center for Biological Diversity), who got married on October 25th, 2025 at the China Ranch Date Farm in Tecopa, California! Following the ceremony, there was a beautiful reception under a colorful desert sunset in Shoshone Village. California native plants, the desert, and love were celebrated throughout the event!

Naomi and Patrick with a sign that reads "JOIN TEAM BUCKWHEAT", celebrating their mutual passion for *Eriogonum tiehmii* (Tiehm's buckwheat).



Members of the 2025 SCB board, meeting via Zoom!

SCB Grants Program

Did you know that SCB has a long tradition of awarding grants? We'll be announcing the 2026 winners in the next Leaflets!

* SCB Annual Grant
* Susan Hobbs Grant for Field Research
* Alan Romspert Grant in Desert Botany
* Jessica Mae Orozco Diversity Grant
* SCB Conservation Grant

For more information, visit socalbot.org/grants or inquire at grants@socalbot.org

Please donate to the SCB Grants Program and help fund these wonderful grants: paypal.me/socalbot?locale.x=en_US

Other Grants Programs

* CNPS Student Research Grants, cnps.org/education/students/grants
* Orange County Chapter CNPS Grants, occnps.org/education/grants.html
* Dean Taylor Botanical Exploration Memorial Award, norcalbotanists.org
* California grassland research, cnga.org/GRASSgrants

Membership

Join SCB or renew your existing membership online via PayPal at: socalbot.org

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We like short informal articles, notes, sketches, & photographs. Send email to the Editor: ninahouse@berkeley.edu

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